



## LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION COUNTRY PROFILE

# Niger

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## ABBREVIATIONS

CAPED	Pedagogical Activity Cell
CEPE	Certificat D'Etudes Primaires Elementaires
CFEEN	Certificat de fin d'études des Écoles Normales
CGDES	Comité de Gestion Décentralisée d'établissement Scolaire
EGR	Early Grade Reading
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
ENI	Écoles Normales d'Instituteurs
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
L1	First Language
L2	Second (or additional) Language
LOI	Language of Instruction
LOI1	Language of Instruction Spoken at Home
LOI2	Subsequent Language of Instruction
MCC	Millennial Challenge Corporation
MEP	Ministry of Primary Education
NECS	Niger Education and Community Strengthening
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
REEP-A	Research for Effective Education Programming—Africa
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

## INTRODUCTION

Enhancing reading skills in the early primary grades is a key education priority for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Despite some improvements in access and learning in sub-Saharan Africa, literacy levels in the early grades remain low, and progress has been slow. Efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the early grades have led to an increased focus on the role of the language of instruction (LOI). Recent research has demonstrated that mismatches between the LOI and the language that students and teachers speak and understand best can hamper effective teaching and learning (University Research Co., 2019). Thus, it is critical to understand the LOI policy and linguistic context of a country when trying to improve learning outcomes in the early grades, as this can be a potential barrier to gains in literacy and learning outcomes.

Currently, USAID supports **Early Grade Reading (EGR) initiatives in 19 countries across sub-Saharan Africa**. Many policies in these countries have recently shifted toward adopting the LOI spoken at home (LOI1) as the language for initial literacy acquisition, and then transitioning to a second or additional language, such as a regional, national, or international language, as the subsequent language of instruction (LOI2).

Government policies and strategies related to teachers and LOI reflect country priorities, approaches, and objectives for early grade literacy, and thus are crucial to the design of programs that are effectively aligned with country literacy aims and approaches. During the design-phase of donor-funded reading programs, decisions are made regarding the manner and extent to which national policies are incorporated into project design, and when alternative approaches or additional elements need to be considered. However, government policies on LOI, and other information relevant for informing design, are often difficult to find and are not easily accessible.



The LOI country profiles aim to address this need. The profiles will allow the USAID Africa Bureau, USAID Missions, and partner organizations to quickly understand the country's linguistic and policy context in order to design an approach that most effectively helps improve EGR outcomes. These profiles, designed for 18 of the countries with current or upcoming USAID EGR initiatives, aim to clearly and succinctly describe and illustrate the country's linguistic landscape and official LOI policy. This country profile in particular provides information on language policy and practice in Niger.

## LINGUISTIC CONTEXT

According to *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, published by SIL International, there are 23 languages in Niger; all of which are living. Of these, 19 are indigenous and four are non-indigenous. Furthermore, five are institutional, seven are developing, nine are vigorous, and two are in trouble (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2020).

Hausa, a recognized indigenous language, is the most widely spoken language in Niger with 15.5 million speakers, 11 million of which speak it as their first language (L1) and 4.5 million as their second language (L2). Zarma, also a recognized indigenous language, is the second most widely spoken language, with 3.9 million speakers. This is followed by French, the national language, with 2.5 million speakers, of which 4,600 are L1 speakers and 2.5 million are L2 speakers. Other recognized indigenous languages that are also developing languages are Western Niger Fulfulde, with 1 million speakers, Central-Eastern Niger Fulfulde, with 754,000 speakers, and Manga Kanuri, with 280,000 speakers. Tamajaq, a vigorous language, is another recognized indigenous language, which has 450,000 speakers (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2020). See Figure 2 for detailed information on languages and the populations that speak them.

## OFFICIAL LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION POLICY

Niger's 1998 Law of Orientation states that the languages of instruction are French as well as the five national indigenous languages: Fulfulde, Hausa, Zarma, Kanuri, and Tamajaq (Albaugh, 2012). The national indigenous languages may be used as the LOI through Grade 3, and French is to be used as the LOI for the remainder of primary school and secondary school (Nordstrum, 2015). In 2015, the government began implementing multilingual education with the five national indigenous languages (Alama, 2019).

### Most widely-spoken languages in Niger

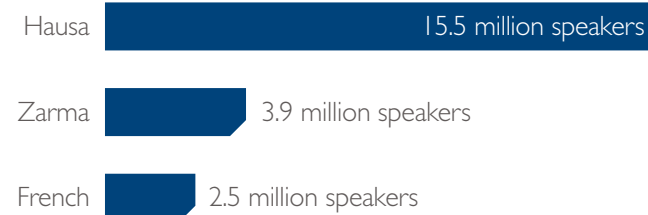


Figure 1. Map of Niger



Figure 2 Linguistic mapping of Niger



Source: Eberhard, David M., Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig (eds.). (2020). *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. Twenty-third edition. Dallas, Texas: SIL International. Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com>.

## CLASS TIME

In Niger, primary school spans six years and is attended by children ages six to twelve. The six grades are organized into three sub-cycles (Grades 1-2; Grades 3-4; Grade 5-6). Upon completion of primary school, students sit for an examination and are awarded the Certificat D'Etudes Primaires Elementaires (CEPE).

In 2004, the Ministry of Primary Education (MEP) introduced a comprehensive primary education reform program, which included adopting a situation-based approach that contextualizes learning within selected themes or topics. For example, the Grade 1 curriculum is constructed around two principle themes: the Nigerien market (specifically the Market of Boubon) and local professions (specifically blacksmithing). All classroom subjects (language learning, reading, writing, mathematics, history, etc.) relate to those themes, building student competencies within that thematic framework (Plan International USA, 2019)

## PRE-SERVICE TEACHER TRAINING CURRICULUM FOR LITERACY

Teacher training is conducted by the Écoles Normales d'Instituteurs (ENIs). There are seven ENIs across Niger that offer the Certificat de Fin d'Etudes du Premier Degré (Nordstrum, 2015). The ENI training courses last one or two years, depending on the admission profiles of the student teachers. Student teachers who enter with a junior secondary school diploma train for two years and obtain an end-of-studies certificate (Certificat de fin d'études des Écoles Normales, CFEEN) as an Assistant Primary Teacher. Student teachers who hold a senior secondary school diploma are trained for one year and obtain a CFEEN as a Primary Teacher.

The training content for Assistant Primary Teachers and Primary Teachers is the same; however, the length of the training for Primary Teachers is shorter than that of Assistant Primary Teachers (Daghe, Martin, Cordeiro, Schneuwly, Thevenaz-Christen, & Toulou, 2017). The training content alternates between pedagogical theory and practice, and is organized around three training units based on the primary school sub-cycles (Grades 1-2; Grades 3-4; Grade 5-6). The training modules cover:

- Educational psychology
- Didactics of disciplines
- Math and French
- Professional ethics and legislation, physical education and sports, national languages, and the sociology of education

The French modules are primarily intended for student teachers training to become Assistant Primary Teachers whose ability to teach in French is very low, with the aim of improving their proficiency over the two years of training (Daghe et al., 2017).

Student teachers are also required to complete 10 to 11 weeks of student teaching in order to receive certification. This entails five weeks of guided teaching and five to six weeks of independently managing a class (Nordstrum, 2015).

## TEACHER LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY/LANGUAGE SPECIFIC TRAINING

Two of the seven ENIs offer training on bilingual education, with the aim of responding to the needs of teachers on the ground. This training consists of modules on the five national indigenous languages: Hausa, Fulfulde, Zarma, Kanuri and Tamajaq. In addition, the student teachers are offered didactics courses in the national languages for five hours per week. Student teachers who complete this module receive an official certificate, as well as their CFEEN, stating that they have completed the bilingual education training (Daghe et al., 2019).

## TEACHER IN-SERVICE

In-service training for teachers in Niger is organized at different levels, ranging from the school level to the regional level. At the school level, training takes place in what is called a 'Mini Pedagogical Activity Cell' (or Mini-CAPED). The Mini-CAPED is managed by the school principal, who is tasked with creating a practical framework for the exchange of practices and peer-to-peer training in the school (Daghe et al., 2017).

The next level of training takes place within the educational sector and is managed by an educational advisor. Due to the large number of schools per sector, sectors are divided into sub-groups called Pedagogical Activity Cells (CAPEDs), consisting of no more than 36 teachers. Training for CAPEDs normally entails two five-day gatherings per year, which are organized by the educational advisor. Educational advisors also offer individualized professional development through routine teacher observation and feedback sessions (Daghe et al., 2017).

Beyond the sector level, training also takes place at the Inspectorate level, which is the educational unit that oversees several educational sectors. Inspectors offer opportunities for professional development by performing routine teacher observation in the field (Daghe et al., 2017). The established norm is for one inspector to oversee a maximum of 144 teachers.

Above the Inspectorate, the Regional Directorate is also involved in teacher training. These directorates are managed by regional directors who establish the regional education and training plans (Daghe et al., 2019). However, the Regional Directorates do not intervene directly in the field. Additionally, the ENIs offer a 30-45-day training certificate program for teachers currently in the field (Nordstrum, 2015).



## USAID READING PROGRAM APPROACH AND ONGOING PROGRAMS

In alignment with the U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education, USAID's programming in Niger aims to support the needs and priorities of the partner country in order to ensure that gains from the programming are sustained. Thus, USAID launched the **Niger Education and Community Strengthening (NECS)** program, a seven-year (2012-2019) \$13 million nationwide pilot program implemented by Plan International USA that coupled targeted community mobilization with comprehensive early grade reading interventions for boys and girls in Grades 1-2. The program operated in 183 primary schools in all eight regions of Niger: Agadez, Diffa, Dosso, Maradi, Tahoua, Tillabéri and Zinder. It promoted early grade reading using national languages, focusing on four: Fulfulde, Hausa, Kanuri, and Zarma (Plan International USA, 2019).

NECS worked closely with the MEP and local communities to meet two primary strategic objectives: increase student grade reading achievement and increase access to quality education in school, especially for girls (Plan International USA, 2019). Further, NECS developed Grade 1 and 2 curriculum materials, including student manuals and teacher guides, and conducting targeted training for teachers and school directors. Student performance was assessed through both continuous classroom assessments and summative early grade reading assessments (EGRA). In support of these initiatives, the program promoted a culture of reading in NECS pilot communities, identifying leaders within the community to manage community libraries, improve parent literacy and conduct community-wide reading competitions, writing workshops and other mobilization activities (Plan International USA, 2019).

### USAID Support to the Government of Niger<sup>1</sup>

Currently, the Government of Niger is implementing a national education program to increase educational access, quality, and retention. USAID is contributing to these

objectives, building on results achieved through an earlier collaboration with Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), with programming that fosters a reading culture and early grade reading in local languages; an improved school environment, especially for girls; increased parental engagement; and strengthened community linkages with education administration. Additional support for an impact evaluation of these activities aims to help the MEP make evidence-based policy and program decisions. In 2013, the U.S. signed on to the partnership framework in support of the Government of Niger's 10-year (2014-2024) national education and training sector program.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WITHIN USAID PROJECTS

The NECS program promoted a culture of reading in the pilot communities, identifying leaders within the community to manage community libraries, improved parent literacy, and conducted community-wide reading competitions as well as writing workshops and other mobilization activities. NECS activities also strengthened key school structures such as school management committees (Comité de Gestion Décentralisée d'établissement Scolaire-CGDES) and student governments, increasing their ability to manage school reform efforts and conduct effective community outreach. In addition, NECS fostered student mentoring programs at the community level and worked with existing structures to organize catch-up classes to mitigate the effects of frequent disruptions to the school schedule (Plan International USA, 2019).

Additionally, through the support to the Government of Niger, USAID aims to improve and increase community participation in education, in part through support to parents' education. USAID hopes to address some of the root causes of the high absenteeism levels that plague the education system in Niger; address the gender disparity, and promote social cohesion.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, see: <https://www.usaid.gov/niger/education>



## OTHER DONOR FUNDED READING PROGRAMS

Alongside USAID, several other organizations are involved in implementing projects to address literacy and language issues, which are detailed below, across Niger:

### Global Partnership for Education (GPE)

GPE, through coordination with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the European Union, is supporting the Education and Training Sector Plan (2014-2024), which outlines a series of priorities, including improving the quality of basic education by introducing mother tongue instruction in early grades, bettering pedagogical supervision, and increasing the supply of teaching and learning materials; continuing the recruitment of state-paid contract teachers and decreasing reliance on civil service teachers; and establishing a new recruitment and redeployment strategy to relocate teachers to rural areas.

Additionally, GPE provided an \$11 million grant to address education needs that have emerged with the COVID-19 pandemic. The program, which is supported by the French Development Agency (Agence Française de Développement) and UNICEF aims to address:

- Strengthened system resilience and coordination with the national budget through Niger's sector pooled funding mechanism, while also responding effectively to immediate needs
- Distance learning by radio, complemented by the distribution of printed materials for the most marginalized populations
- Institutions that provide remedial or alternative education where formal schooling is not available
- Safe reopening of schools with water, sanitation, and hygiene interventions
- Refugee or displaced children through the distribution of radios and school meals
- Girls by addressing the barriers to learning they face, with back-to-school campaigns and menstrual hygiene kits for the new school year

### The World Bank<sup>2</sup>

The World Bank launched the **Learning Improvement for Results in Education Project for Niger**, a six-year (2020-2026) \$140 million project that aims to improve the quality of teaching and learning conditions in select regions and strengthen education planning and management. Among some of the specific aims of the project are improving teaching practices through: 1) strengthening teacher education colleges through improved curriculum and training method; 2) developing a teacher coaching and supervision system to improve the quality of classroom instruction by developing a teacher professional development program and delivering local and individualized coaching activities to upgrade the content knowledge and pedagogical practices of teachers with a focus on literacy and mathematics; and 3) providing teaching and learning materials to ensure the availability of relevant educational materials in the classroom. Additionally, the project aims to improve learning for vulnerable populations in Niger by supporting students who are not performing well academically and are at risk of leaving the education system and supporting the development of an accelerated program for these marginalized populations to integrate children into the formal school system.

### Concern Worldwide<sup>3</sup>

**The Light of Learning** is a three-year (2018-2021) teacher training and quality improvement project implemented by Concern Worldwide in the Tahoua region of Niger. The project aims to improve education at 54 schools in Niger by creating a safe learning environment for 13,100 children and improving the teaching skills of 280 teachers. As such, each school formulates and enforces a code of conduct, and the children participate in decision making via a child-led council. Concern Worldwide also supports the government in providing teaching materials, training teachers in bilingual education, offering refresher training to teachers, and teaching trainers to monitor learning outcomes. The aim is that, when the project is finished, significantly more children will be able to read fluently, pupils and teachers' presence will be better monitored, and the number of violent incidents will have decreased.

2 For more information, see: <https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/project-detail/PI68779>

3 For more information, see: <http://www.secheresse.info/spip.php?article87515>

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